

Protect the Coastal Height Limit
Council President Scott Peters, First District
For the La Jolla Village News, April 2007

Visitors from the East Coast are consistently impressed by the fact that you can see the San Diego coast long before you arrive there. This may have something to do with topography and the sloping of the coast to the ocean, but to many tourists, the difference is the height of the buildings here. The City of San Diego has some of the most regulated coastal vistas and public access points in the United States. Residents maintain a connection to the coast, even if they do not visit the beach, as it is clearly visible and a daily presence in the lives of many. It is not a walled-off and isolated place.

San Diego voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition D in November 1972. Prop D established a 30-foot height limit on new construction on private and city property in the City's coastal zone west of Interstate 5, with the exception of Little Italy and Downtown. The ballot language in favor of Proposition D stated that the intended purpose of the proposition was to preserve "the unique and beautiful character of the coastal zone of San Diego," and prohibited buildings that obstructed "ocean breezes, sky and sunshine."

Over the past 35 years, this height restriction has been strictly enforced, maintaining the picturesque views in communities like La Jolla and enhancing the quality of life for all San Diegans. In the past three decades, voters have only chosen to amend the ordinance and allow buildings higher than 30-feet in the coastal zone three times. Those were for specific properties: the old Mission Brewery west of Mission Hills, SeaWorld and the Gateway of the Americas project in San Ysidro.

Every few years, community activists warn of an assault on the 30-foot height limit. Regardless of disputes over how the 30 feet is calculated; community plan updates which critics contend will weaken the height limit; amendments to planned district ordinances; or the new state-mandated affordable density bonus; Proposition D remains as strong as when it was approved by voters.

The recent revitalization of Downtown, East Village and Little Italy produced a boom in high-rise construction unique in San Diego's history. Some activists worry that the growing acceptance of high-rises so near the waterfront will erode public support for the height limit in other areas along the coast. I disagree.

I strongly support the Proposition D 30-foot height limit. As a member of the Coastal Commission, I had the opportunity to travel throughout the coastal regions of California. The City of San Diego 30-foot height restriction was one of the strictest height land use regulations along the coast. I wouldn't have it any other way.

This month, the City Council will consider the so-called density bonus ordinance, which brings San Diego into compliance with a state law meant to spur the development of affordable housing. Though I have been repeatedly reassured that the proposal being put forward by the Mayor does not endanger the Prop D height limit, I must be certain that

this is the case before I can support the draft ordinance. I encourage you to join us as we consider ways to improve the quality of life of all San Diegans while maintaining the features of our neighborhoods which we hold most dear.